

Clearing the Stereotype:
You Christians Are Hypocritical
A Study of Luke 7:36-50

Big Idea: Our lives answer the question: Is grace real?

Related Scriptures: Matthew 23:25-26; Romans 5:6-21; Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 1:1-14; 2:1-9; 1 John 4:19

Introduction:

1. Our New Year's resolution at Moon Valley is to ► seek seven. We're asking God to use each and every one of us to help seven people move a little farther down the road toward a relationship with Christ in 2009.

But there is an obstacle in that road, and we need to ► clear the way. There is a six-headed stereotype that stands between our seven and Christ. Here are the heads:

- "You Christians are hypocritical."
- "You Christians are too focused on getting converts."
- "You Christians are antihomosexual."
- "You Christians are sheltered."
- "You Christians are too political."
- "You Christians are judgmental."

This is the prevailing image unbelievers have of us as Christians.¹ It hinders their progress toward Christ. It makes them feel like they don't belong with us. And they're never going to believe unless they first feel like they belong. They check us out before they check Christ out. They come to community before they come to Christ.

We need to clear the way.

2. So far, I've tried to lop off three heads of the stereotype: ► "You Christians are too focused on getting converts." ► "You Christians are judgmental." ► "You Christians are sheltered."
3. Today, I want to try to lop off a fourth head ► "You Christians are hypocritical."

¹ David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *UnChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007).

A recent study was conducted among young people outside the Christian faith to find out what they think about Christians in America. The results are reported by David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons in ► a book titled, *UnChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity and Why It Matters*. Here's what got my attention.

An overwhelming ► majority of young Americans outside the Christian faith—some 84%—say they personally know at least one committed Christian.² That means among young Americans who are not Christ followers, over eight out of ten are personally rubbing shoulders with somebody they know who is a Christian. This seems like a great opportunity for a new, unbelieving generation to see how the Christian faith is lived out. Young outsiders are getting to observe the insiders up close and personal. Should be good. Right?

Well, here's the kicker. Only ► 15% of the outsiders think the lifestyles of the Christians they personally know are any different from the norm.³ So, while 84% are getting a good look at how professing Christians live; only 15% are noticing any difference at all.

It would be tempting to ► dismiss perceived hypocrisy as just a trumped-up excuse to reject Christ. But other research seems to back up these perceptions of unbelievers. Kinnaman, ► explains, "In virtually every study we conduct, representing thousands of interviews every year, born-again Christians fail to display much attitudinal or behavioral evidence of transformed lives."⁴

It's not ► surprising then, that one of the most prominent perceptions about present-day Christians—a perception held by fully 85% of young outsiders—is that we are hypocrites.⁵ We "say one thing and live something entirely different."⁶ We don't walk what we talk.

4. Not only is this convicting, it's frustrating, too. Frustrating because it's hard to know where to start. We're all hypocrites to some degree. Not just Christians. Everybody.

² David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *UnChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity and Why It Matters*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 48.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 41.

We've all failed to live up to our own standards.

But I suspect there is a certain strain of Christian hypocrisy that is particularly problematic. And it has to do with grace. Let ► me explain.

Grace is the distinguishing message of Christianity. Grace is getting something great we don't deserve. Grace is about receiving a free gift that we don't earn. The gospel is a story of amazing grace. We sing about grace. We preach about grace. We claim that, by His death and resurrection for our sins, Christ alone graciously promises eternal life to all who will simply believe Him for it. We say that it is by grace alone that God offers us this free gift of eternal life. The core message of Christianity is one of grace. True Christianity stands alone among the world's religions in claiming that God operates not on a system of merit, but one of grace. We do not and cannot earn our way to heaven by making sure we do enough good things; it is by God's grace alone that He gives the free gift of eternal life to all who will simply receive it by faith. True Christianity says good people don't go to heaven; only forgiven people do—people forgiven by God's grace.

That is our talk. Our Christian grace talk.

But when we talk grace, I think most folks outside the church ask themselves a question. Is this grace real? Is it legit? Is it authentic? Because it sure sounds too good to be true. Nothing else in life operates that way. There must be a catch. There's no grace like this at school, or at work, or at home, or anywhere else. In fact, it seems unfair. It's getting the greatest thing ever at no personal cost whatsoever.

And so, it is perfectly reasonable for outsiders to ask themselves the question: Is grace real?

And where do they find an answer? Where do they look for evidence that grace is real? Where do they seek some validation of this amazing grace idea?

In us. That's where. In you and me.

Our lives answer the question: Is grace real? In fact, that's ► the big idea of my sermon. Our lives answer the question: Is grace real? I believe the world is looking at those of us who profess to be Christians and they're looking for evidence. Evidence that grace is real. Is grace real?

And here's the rub. I'm afraid many of us professing Christians just don't get grace. Or at least we don't act like we get it. We talk about a grace system, but we act like we're on a merit system, and it doesn't add up. We say that we've been saved by grace alone, and then we act like we had something to do with it, and it doesn't make sense. We hold a theological position that is gracious, but we have an ungracious attitude, and it doesn't jibe.

And it's not just my opinion. There's some research to back it up. It's from the same source I mentioned earlier. Listen carefully to ► this quote:

Our research shows that Christians believe the primary reason outsiders have rejected Christ is that they cannot handle the rigorous standards of following Christ. ► There is a nuance here that allows Christians to feel like they're better than other people, more capable of being holy and sinless. ► We rationalize that outsiders don't want to become Christ followers because they can't really cut it.⁷

Now there's an attitude. If we Christians really think that outsiders don't want to become Christ followers because they can't really cut it, then we must think that we *can* cut it. And this you-can't-cut-it-but-we-can attitude is thicker than the *Hai Karate* cologne at my junior-high prom. You can smell it a long way off.

And ► this you-can't-cut-it-but-we-can attitude does not square with our grace talk. Nor does it square with recent studies of our behavior, which show that we Christians, as a group, haven't been able to cut it any better than anybody else these days. By my count, that makes us doubly hypocritical.

Our lives answer the question: Is grace real? And too often, the answer is no. No is the wrong answer, but what else to unbelievers have to go on?

How do we get to yes?

The good news is that I suspect it's simpler than you might think. And I don't think it starts with behaving a whole lot better, although that would certainly be good. I think it starts with thinking a whole lot more clearly about grace.

5. This morning I want to study a part of the Bible that presents us with a contrast between two people: one person who gets grace, and another person who doesn't. The lives of these two people offer contrasting answers to the question: Is grace real? One says yes. The other says no.
 - I. Let me first describe the two people. They are both involved in the same biblical story.

The story is recorded in the Gospel of ► Luke, Chapter 7, Verses 36 through 50. It was the summer of AD 30.⁸

- A. The first person is a religious leader known as a Pharisee who had invited Jesus to his

⁷ Ibid, 51.

⁸ Johnston M. Cheney and Stanley Ellisen, *Jesus Christ: The Greatest Life Ever Lived*, (Eugene, OR: Paradise Publishing, 1999), 66.

home for dinner. The name of the Pharisee ► was Simon.

We have good reasons to suspect that Simon's motives were something less than entirely hospitable. Perhaps he had invited Jesus over for dinner to somehow trick Him.⁹ Perhaps he was trying to look good because it was considered virtuous to invite a teacher over for dinner, especially if he were from out of town or had just taught in the synagogue.¹⁰ Whatever the motives, Simon showed very little respect for Jesus at the dinner.

It was customary for a host to show hospitality and respect for a guest by providing a way for the guest's feet to be cleaned. People generally wore sandals, and they walked unpaved streets of dirt and mud and dung. At a minimum, water would be provided so that the guest could clean his own feet. Well-to-do hosts would have the lowliest of their servants clean the feet of guests with water.¹¹ But Simon provided no water at all for Jesus, his guest.

It was also customary for a host to show affection and respect for a guest by greeting him with a kiss on the cheek.¹² But Simon did not greet Jesus with a kiss.

Another common gesture of hospitality and respect would be to anoint the head of a guest with a small amount of oil for refreshment.¹³ But Simon did not anoint Jesus with oil.

In spite of these snubs, Jesus reclined to eat with Simon. It was common for the dinner table to be quite low and for guests to be lying around the table on their sides on low couches, their feet away from the table.

B. At dinner, something shocking happened. An ► uninvited woman came into the room. She's the second person.

In that day, it was not unusual for an uninvited person to come to listen to a noted teacher who had been invited to someone's home.¹⁴ Her presence was not shocking; her actions were.

The woman came to Jesus and knelt at his feet. Such an approach would have been startling in itself. While uninvited guests were often allowed to come and listen to a teacher interact with a host, they were expected to observe only, remaining quiet and

⁹ John A. Martin, "Luke," *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament ed.*, John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, eds., (USA: Victor Books, 1983), 223

¹⁰ Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, (Downer's Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1993), 208.

¹¹ Keener, 209.

¹² Martin, 224; Keener, 209.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Martin, 224.

away from the invited guest.¹⁵

But the woman was not quiet and could not keep her distance; she came right up to Jesus, and she was weeping. Later Jesus said this woman had already believed in Him for eternal life and was thus forgiven of her sins.¹⁶ She had been released from her guilt. So profound and complete was her liberation, that her self-consciousness was liberated as well. And so, I suspect the woman had come offering tears of gratefulness and love and worship for her Savior who had shown so much grace toward her.¹⁷ Her tears provided the missing water needed to clean the feet of Jesus. The woman assumed the role of the lowliest of servants and began to wash His feet with her tears, using her hair to wipe away the dirt and mud and dung.

Exposing her hair in public like this would have been scandalous. Proper women kept their heads covered in public; those who did not were considered promiscuous.¹⁸ Indeed, this woman may have been a prostitute. The uncovered hair and the fact that the host later labels her as a noted “sinner” suggest that she had been a harlot.

Having washed the feet of Jesus, her hair matted with the filth of the street, the woman began to kiss His feet over and over again. Apparently, she felt unworthy to kiss Him on the cheek. And perhaps she confined her kisses to His feet because she did not want Jesus to confuse her new worship with her old solicitation.

And the woman anointed His feet with fragrant oil from an alabaster flask she had brought with her. Apparently, she felt that she was unworthy to anoint His head. The fragrant oil may have been a former tool of her trade.¹⁹ Perhaps it was all she had. What she once used on herself to lure a client, she now used on Jesus to refresh her Savior.

II. Those are the two people, Simon and the woman. Which one shows that grace is real?

Does it have anything to do with superior intellect? Or outward piety? Or clever argumentation? Or a better reputation? Or even deeper biblical knowledge? No.

Well then, how can we explain the difference? Jesus explains it for us. Let’s pick up the story, beginning in ► Luke 7:39.

^{NLT} Luke 7:39 When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, “If this man were a prophet, he would know what kind of woman is touching him. She’s a sinner!” ►⁴⁰ Then Jesus answered his thoughts. “Simon,” he said to the Pharisee, “I have something to say to you.” ► “Go

¹⁵ Keener, 209.

¹⁶ Luke 7:50. The woman’s love for Jesus was in response to forgiveness, not a condition of it.

¹⁷ Martin, 224.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

ahead, Teacher,” Simon replied. ▶⁴¹ Then Jesus told him this story: “A man loaned money to two people—500 pieces of silver to one and 50 pieces to the other. ▶⁴² But neither of them could repay him, so he kindly forgave them both, canceling their debts. Who do you suppose loved him more after that?” ▶⁴³ Simon answered, “I suppose the one for whom he canceled the larger debt.” ▶ “That’s right,” Jesus said. ▶⁴⁴ Then he turned to the woman and said to Simon, “Look at this woman kneeling here. ▶ When I entered your home, you didn’t offer me water to wash the dust from my feet, but she has washed them with her tears and wiped them with her hair. ▶⁴⁵ You didn’t greet me with a kiss, but from the time I first came in, she has not stopped kissing my feet. ▶⁴⁶ You neglected the courtesy of olive oil to anoint my head, but she has anointed my feet with rare perfume. ▶⁴⁷ I tell you, her sins—and they are many—have been forgiven, so she has shown me much love. But a person who is forgiven little shows only little love.”

According to Jesus, what is the key difference between Simon and the woman? The weeping woman had a fresh grasp of just how much Jesus had forgiven her. She understood how hopeless she was apart from the grace of Christ. She realized just how far down Jesus had to reach to lift her face. The woman got grace. Simon didn’t get it at all.

And ▶ the point is not that Simon was in better moral shape than the woman and thus justified in not loving Jesus more. Not at all. In fact, Jesus points out in His story that both borrowers were bankrupt. Neither could pay. According to the Bible, apart from Jesus, we’re all spiritually bankrupt. We can’t possibly pay our spiritual debt. It doesn’t really matter how much owe, 500 pieces of silver or 50. Bankrupt is bankrupt.

Before Christ, the Bible describes us using a four-letter word: dead. Spiritually dead.²⁰ The woman in our story was not more dead than Simon before meeting Christ. They were both dead. And there are no degrees of dead. It doesn’t matter whether you drown in a bathtub of sin or an ocean of sin, the result is exactly the same. Dead is dead. You can’t dress up dead.

The woman gets it. She knows she was dead and now she’s alive, solely because of the gracious gift of eternal life she received from the Lord by faith.

Simon doesn’t get it. He thinks he’s not that dead. He thinks he’s not as bad off as the “sinner” woman. He’s got the she-can’t-cut-it-but-I-can attitude. And it’s not just because he hasn’t believed in Jesus yet. Those of us who have believed in Jesus are every bit as capable of losing sight of grace. Just because we got it once, doesn’t mean we can’t forget it. Have we forgotten?

A vagrant lives near the Fulton Fish Market on the lower east side of Manhattan. The slimy smell of fish carcasses and entrails nearly overpowers him, and he hates the trucks that noisily arrive before sunrise. But midtown

²⁰ Ephesians 2:1.

gets crowded, and the cops harass him there. Down by the wharves nobody bothers with a grizzled man who keeps to himself and sleeps on a loading dock behind a Dumpster.

Early one morning when the workers are slinging eel and halibut off the trucks, yelling to each other in Italian, the vagrant rouses himself and pokes through the Dumpsters behind the tourist restaurants. An early start guarantees good pickings: last night's uneaten garlic bread and French fries, nibbled pizza, a wedge of cheesecake. He eats what he can stomach and stuffs the rest in a brown paper sack. The bottles and cans he stashes in plastic bags in his rusty shopping cart.

The morning sun, pale through the harbor fog, finally makes it over the buildings by the wharf. When he sees the ticket from last week's lottery lying in a pile of wilted lettuce, he almost lets it go. But by force of habit he picks it up and jams it in his pocket. In the old days, when luck was better, he used to buy one ticket a week, never more. It's past noon when he remembers the ticket stub and holds it up to the newspaper box to compare the numbers. Three numbers match, the fourth, the fifth—all seven! It can't be true. Things like that don't happen to him. Bums don't win the New York lottery.

But it is true. Later that day he is squinting into the bright lights as television crews present the newest media darling, the unshaven, baggy-pants vagrant will receive \$243,000 per year over the next twenty years. A chic-looking woman wearing a leather miniskirt shoves a microphone in his face and asks, "How do you feel?" He stares back dazed, and catches a whiff of her perfume. It has been a long time, a very long time, since anyone has asked him that question.

He feels like a man who has been to the edge of starvation and back, and is beginning to fathom that he'll never feel hunger again.²¹

True story. And I wonder. I wonder if and when the man will begin to take it for granted. After five years? Maybe ten? I wonder if, at some point, he'll begin to act like he earned it, or that he deserves it, or that he's entitled to it because he's a pretty good person, or that he's somehow better than the other vagrants who are still down by the Fulton Fish Market sleeping behind the Dumpster. I wonder if he'll even begin to think that the other bums are still there because they just can't cut it, but he can.

It wouldn't surprise me. Because we all seem to have an amazing capacity to forget grace.

As believers in Jesus Christ, we didn't win the lottery. We got more. Far more. We didn't get \$243,000 per year over the next twenty years. That's peanuts. We got every spiritual blessing

²¹ Philip Yancey, *What's So Amazing About Grace?*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 46.

every day for eternity. In Christ, we are secure, chosen, honored, wonderful, accountable, exalted, fully known, set apart, blameless, loved, adopted, rescued, delightful, graced, redeemed, forgiven, cherished, lavished, enlightened, gratifying, mobilized, sought after, and sealed forever.²² All by grace, not by works, that no one should boast.²³

Our lives answer the question: Is grace real? When we get grace, the answer is yes. When we forget grace, the answer is no.

Do we get grace? Or do we forget grace? I'm afraid the answer is yes and yes. We forget grace all the time. We need to be reminded so we get it again.

That's one reason why the Lord asks us to take communion. It's a way to remember grace.

Communion is a bunch of Christian bums pulling out the old winning lottery ticket to remember the before and after.

Communion is a bunch of Christian harlots weeping at the feet of Jesus, showing that we get it. We get grace.

²² Ephesians 1:1-14.

²³ Ephesians 2:8-9.